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SUBJECT: BELGRADE HOPES FOR SLOW CHANGE IN KOSOVO STATUS

Summary

1. (SBU) Kosovo Ministry officials told visiting State and Defense Department representatives on January 30 that only a compromise on Kosovo final status would lead to a durable solution. Assistant Kosovo Ministers urged "incremental" changes in Kosovo and said a "surge to independence" would destabilize Serbia and the region. In a separate meeting, members of NATO's liaison office said that Serbia will not progress towards a more productive relationship with NATO in the near term due to Kosovo. End Summary.

Kosovo "in Crisis"

2. (SBU) Serbian officials said that because of Kosovo's current "crisis," sudden changes in Kosovo status would lead to instability. Assistant Ministers for Kosovo Ljubomir Kljakic and Branislava Alendar told visiting Kosovo Desk Officer, RPM NATO Officer and Pentagon NATO Policy Officer on January 30 that Kosovo status should be solved incrementally and through compromise. Kljakic, who handles the Ministry's relations with civilian and military international organizations, said that there was "no unity" on Kosovo because of disagreements "between the State Department and Serbia...the United States and Russia, and the European Union and Russia." He said that Kosovo remained in a "social, economic, ethnic, and moral crisis" and that only a compromise would bring a "durable solution." Kljakic blamed "international pressure" in support of a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) for "destabilizing the region."

Only Political Problems with International Community

3. (SBU) Serbian officials said that, while current problems regarding Kosovo were "political not technical," a "surge" to independence would destabilize the region. Kljakic said that the Serbian Army's relations with KFOR were "excellent" and that there were no homegrown groups in Serbia intended to cause violence. He called the Tsar Lazar Guard "a hypothetical military." Alendar said that relations with UNMIK and the EU were also "fine," although she said that UNMIK officials' "continued support" for Kosovo independence was "inappropriate." Both Kljakic and Alendar said that the GOS would not react with force to independence. Alendar said that the "best defense of Kosovo Serbs [was] defense of international law."

4. (SBU) The Kosovo Ministry officials had no answer when asked how, or if, Serbian security services would cooperate with an EU policing mission to Kosovo. The U.S. visitors urged the Serbian side to make this a priority, particularly in light of its good current relations with international organizations.

No Fast Moves

¶5. (SBU) Kosovo Ministry Advisor Stanko Blagojevic warned that a "surge" to independence would destabilize Kosovo. While Blagojevic said that he was unable to impart details of the GOS plans for responding to Kosovo independence, he said that government officials understood Kosovo's status quo was "unsustainable." He said the GOS planned to "maintain or increase investment in Kosovo Serb communities." The government "strongly opposed" formation of a Kosovo army or any armed force," he said. With "incremental" moves, Blagojevic said, the GOS and the international community could maintain stability, but he did not offer details. Blagojevic said that he hoped the United States shared the Serbian Government's view of existing security agreements like the Kumanovo Agreement that "if it isn't broken, don't fix it." (In September 2007, Kosovo Ministry State Secretary Dusan Prorokovic made headlines by saying Kumanovo, the 1999 agreement between NATO and Yugoslavia which allowed KFOR to operate in Kosovo, would be void if Kosovo declared independence.)

MLO Inert

¶6. (SBU) Officials in NATO's Military Liaison Office (MLO) similarly urged a "go slow" approach on Serbia's path toward NATO membership. Italian General Lucio Batta, Chief of the MLO, said that the GOS differences with the international community over Kosovo made progress "unrealistic" and that there was "too much at stake" to push too hard. Other than offering office space within the Defense Ministry, Batta could not point to specific government efforts to embrace NATO.

Comment

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¶7. (SBU) The GOS intention to avoid the Ahtisarri Plan's provision for a EU presence, and instead handle post-independence Kosovo policy by seeking to work through UNMIK, UNSCR 1244, and other existing military agreements, is likely to hit a brick wall. Finding a mechanism to enable Serbian cooperation with an EU mission to Kosovo will be a challenge. End Comment.

¶8. (U) EUR/SCE and RPM have cleared this message.

MUNTER